

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, January 29, 2019

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions
&
Office of Immigration
Atlantic Immigration Pilot**

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. Brendan Maguire (Chairman)
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Bill Horne
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo
Ms. Alana Paon
Mr. Brad Johns
Mr. Lenore Zann
Ms. Tammy Martin

[Mr. Ben Jessome replaced Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo]

In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Brendan Maguire

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm going to call the Standing Committee on Human Resources to order. My name is Brendan Maguire. I'm the chair of the committee. Today we will be reviewing appointments for ABCs, and we're also going to be receiving a presentation from the CEO of Immigration, Tracey Taweel, and Susan Ley, Executive Director.

I just remind everyone to put your phones on vibrate. The washrooms and coffee are in the next room. We're going to start by introducing ourselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right now, we're having an issue with the PowerPoint presentation, so we are going to start with our ABCs, if that's okay with everybody here.

Does anyone have any motions? The member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: I would like to put forward the motion, for the Department of Business, Board of Directors of Develop Nova Scotia Limited, appointments for the board of directors, that the following appointments be approved: Lori Burke, Maurice Fares, Chrystal Fuller, Steven Slauenwhite, and Ronald Smith as directors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. ALANA PAON: I just had a question. I know that we had 55 applicants - I believe it was 55. My number tells me it was 55. I'm just wondering why we're not recommending seven people as opposed to the five that we have here. It's nice to see that there are some people who are being put on the board who are from outside of HRM, which I think is really important since the scope of Develop Nova Scotia has broadened enormously.

I'm not seeing anybody here, though, from northern Nova Scotia, and I know that all of the present board members, if my memory serves me correctly from our last sitting, are from HRM save one from Lunenburg. There's no one here yet from northern Nova Scotia. Specifically, there's no one here from Cape Breton Island. I know, again, the scope of the project, especially cellular service and broadband service, is rolling out across the province. Of those 55 applicants, were there no applicants from northern Nova Scotia whatsoever?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We wouldn't have those details, but we can certainly reach out to the department. Mr. MacKay.

MR. MACKAY: I would like to bring the member's attention to the first appointment, Lori Burke, executive director of the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, which to the last of my recollection is certainly northern Nova Scotia.

MS. PAON: I apologize.

MR. MACKAY: I think that this list of appointments - while I understand the member wishing to ensure that there's broad representation from the province, I think we see that. We see certainly central Nova Scotia. We see the Annapolis Valley. We see Cape Breton. I think it's a good representation.

MS. PAON: I apologize, Mr. Chairman, I think I skipped over Southside Boularderie by accident. It's still early this morning. Thank you very much for pointing that out, and very good to see.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Moving to the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, more specifically the Cumberland Regional Library Board, I move that the appointments of Dale Fawthrop and Amanda-Leigh MacLeod as members be approved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: For the Department of Environment, I so move that Marc Britney be appointed as member and vice-chair to the Resource Recovery Fund Board (Divert Nova Scotia).

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MR. BRAD JOHNS: Similar to the first one, I want to point out that our staff tell us that there were eight applicants that came forward for the two vacancies, but we're only recommending one here. I'm curious to know why we're not looking at a second recommendation. I would make note that three of those applicants were female. I don't know what the composition of the board is, but I don't know why we're only making one here when it looks like we had eight applicants.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll have to dig into it and see how many positions were open. It may strictly be the amount of positions that were open, but we'll definitely look into it for you.

MR. JOHNS: I'm also curious, this is a new member and he'll be taking the position of vice-chairman, will he?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. JOHNS: I find that interesting as well. I'm just curious about what the makeup of the old board was - why this gentleman is taking over as vice-chairman as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can certainly look into it, but just looking at his qualifications, he seems to be someone who is extremely experienced. But we can definitely look into that for you too.

Would all those in favour of the motion, please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. Lohnes-Croft on the Department of Justice.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Chairman, I so move, to the Department of Justice, that Cheryl Knockwood, Denise Mentis-Smith and Raymond Tynes be appointed as commissioners of the Human Rights Commission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion, please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Horne on the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

MR. BILL HORNE: Mr. Chairman, I so move that Blair MacDougall and Jennifer Matthews be appointed as members of industry to the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Area Occupational Health and Safety Council.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion, please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

It looks like our technical issues are now solved, so we will get onto the subject at hand, and allow our two witnesses to open up with some comments - Ms. Taweel.

MS. TRACEY Taweel: Thank you for having me here today at Human Resources Committee. With me is Suzanne Ley, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. As this committee considers issues related to human resources and labour in our province, we do appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you our work on immigration and specifically the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program.

To begin, I want to set a bit of context in the area of immigration. As many of you would be aware, immigration is a shared jurisdiction with the federal government. The federal government, in fact, has the lion's share of responsibility, including setting national levels and policy objectives and approving all admissions to the country.

Immigration is a priority and we are committed to working with the federal government to increase immigration to Nova Scotia. There is a shared recognition that immigration can not only increase our population, but also grow our economy, fill labour market needs and make Nova Scotia a vibrant and dynamic society.

I would like to tell you a little bit about the strategic approach that we're taking in the Office of Immigration. To deliver on government's priority for increasing immigration, our office has been driving an ambitious agenda, focused on four key areas outlined on the slide you see in front of you.

Leadership at the local and national levels. We've been working very hard to increase capacity to continually innovate and demonstrate that we are willing to take on new challenges, all while maintaining a high degree of program integrity. At the local level, we know that government can't achieve our objectives on immigration alone. It takes

strong commitment from community partners, settlement organizations and partners, employers, universities, industry associations, municipalities and others.

Promoting Nova Scotia as an attractive place to live. We know that Nova Scotia is competing with countries around the world to attract highly skilled and educated people. While we have done international recruitment for many years, we have realigned this work to have a bigger impact in a smaller number of key markets. We also know that to reach potential, newcomers need to focus on our unique offering - our quality of life and personality and the opportunities provided to newcomers.

We are very focused on maximizing every opportunity through selection programs that are strong and responsive. We work very hard to maximize all of the streams that are available to us to bring newcomers to our province. We are continually innovating program streams and guidelines to ensure we're meeting labour market needs. This means we're open and transparent about how we can innovate to help employers fill gaps.

Integrating newcomers into communities and into the workplace. As more immigrants join our communities, we have invested more money in immigrant settlement services. The Office of Immigration provides almost \$6.4 million annually for newcomer services including language training, employment bridging and readiness programs, employer liaison, labour market information, business start-up and development support, and welcoming communities programs.

Our strategic approach is generating results that are making a big impact, and it's not by accident - it's due to planned and strategically executed actions and partnerships. Over the last three years, Nova Scotia welcomed more than 15,000 immigrants. Over a 10-year period, we have grown our provincial selection by more than 375 per cent. In 2013, our allocation was 600. In 2018, we supported 2,272 nominations and endorsements, and 71 per cent of immigrants stay in our province, which is the highest retention rate of the Atlantic Provinces.

Those that do stay do well. For Nova Scotia's working-age immigrants who have been in the country less than five years, the unemployment rate was 8.7 per cent in 2017, which is 1.7 per cent lower than the Canadian average of 10.4 per cent. Immigrants are also twice as likely to work in their field of expertise than anywhere else in the country. Nova Scotia has the lowest wage gap in Canada between immigrants and non-immigrants.

Public perception is also positive. In 2018, omnibus research found that 84 per cent of Nova Scotians believe immigration has a positive impact on our province. At the centre of all this, because of immigration, Nova Scotia has record-high population levels.

I mentioned earlier that we are very focused on maximizing every opportunity that is available to us to bring newcomers to our province, and there are many pathways. On this slide, I have highlighted the economic class of immigration because most immigrants who come to our province are economic class immigrants through the Provincial Nominee

Program, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, and federal economic programs. The province plays a direct role in these pathways. Today we are going to talk more about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and the program's three streams, which you see here on the screen in green.

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot was launched in March 2017 as a three-year pilot. An initiative under the Atlantic Growth Strategy, its aim is to fill persistent labour gaps. The province's role with AIP is focused on the employer. The employer applies to be designated through the program. We then assess whether they are operating in good standing, have a labour need, and are committed to assisting a newcomer with settlement. The employer then requests endorsement of a foreign national, the immigrant themselves. We endorse a foreign national if the job offer is for full-time work, the employer shows diligence with recruiting locally, and there has been a needs assessment and a settlement plan completed for the employee and their family. On average, endorsements have been approved by the province in less than 40 days.

The endorsement then moves on to the federal government. They assess the individual's work, school, and language credentials. They are also able to provide the individual with a temporary work permit while they are processing their permanent residency application. The federal government commits to processing for permanent residency in six months or less under this program, which is an important change, as other streams can take much longer.

It also gives us a chance to test out a new approach that is putting settlement at the forefront of the immigration process. The built-in settlement model brings employers into the settlement conversation, really with the aim of providing wraparound supports for newcomers, testing whether there is an impact on retention.

[10:15 a.m.]

Another key element of success in immigration is providing a high degree of support for employers. Nova Scotia is predominantly made up of small and medium-sized employers, and we know that for a company that has never used immigration before, it can be daunting. If you're a CEO and a software developer and an HR person in your spare time, taking on the task of hiring an immigrant may be daunting. We very intentionally have ensured that we have supports in place for employers to help connect them with settlement supports, helping employers navigate the immigration system, pointing them in the right direction depending on their specific needs, finding talent abroad through international recruitment, and helping make connections in international markets.

In 2018, Nova Scotia had a record year for immigration. As I mentioned earlier - but it is worth mentioning again - we supported 2,272 people for immigration, many of whom immigrate with their families more than ever before. A big part of that was the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

Since the pilot began, and as of the end of 2018, we have designated 737 employers; 40 per cent of those employers are outside of Halifax. Since the pilot began, and as of the end of 2018, we have endorsed 1,073 people, surpassing our target last year.

We have so many examples of employers and foreign nationals finding great success with this program. One that deserves mentioning is Noggins Corner - a mixed farm operation with a year-round farm market. They used the AIP to hire an international graduate who completed research for the company while she was a student. She is now a permanent resident and manager of the company's new apple processing facility. Noggins is now considering using the AIP for other positions they've had difficulty filling, including a truck driver, tour guide, and farm worker.

We are gaining momentum, but this is just the beginning. Immigration is a key tool to strengthen the economic and social fabric of our province. By working closely with our partners in the private and public sectors, we have had and will continue to have a big impact on population growth, economic growth, health care, education, strategic sectors, community innovation and diversity, meeting employers' skilled labour needs, retention of newcomers, and much more.

Our ability to attract and retain newcomers contributes to happier, healthier lives for all Nova Scotians and the communities they live and work in. Immigrants have a lot to offer and we want to make sure they are welcomed as part of our businesses and communities. With that, we would be happy to take your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for that presentation. We'll start with the Progressive Conservative Party - Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I want to express that's significant growth in the last year obviously, and congratulations on that. The program obviously seems to be doing something. I assume it took the first year to kind of get things rolling, but we're seeing results and I'm really happy to see that.

I'm curious about a couple of things. One is, is this program being tapped into by the Nova Scotia Health Authority to look at bringing health care professionals to the province, whether it be doctors or nurses?

MS. TAWHEEL: As you may be aware, we are working with the Nova Scotia Health Authority and have established a dedicated stream specifically for physicians. The Nova Scotia Health Authority is not a designated employer through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, however, they regularly use other immigration streams. I can give you some numbers as well, and the number of health care professionals that have come through other streams that are available through the Provincial Nominee Program.

In fact, since 2013, 732 health care professionals have come through other immigration streams. The physician stream, in particular - we're seeing great success with

that stream and working with the Health Authority to help fill a labour market need that they have in terms of the recruitment of physicians.

MR. JOHNS: Why are they not a recognized employer, and why are they not tapping into this stream in addition to other streams?

MS. TAWHEEL: The Nova Scotia Health Authority works very collaboratively with us using the full suite of programs that are available through the Provincial Nominee Program. We are in active conversations with them about if the Atlantic Immigration Pilot could work for them. I think it's important to remember that the immigration pilot is one offering inside a larger suite of programmatic offerings.

To your opening comments about AIP getting off to maybe a slower start at the beginning, that is largely because we took time to work with employers to determine what would best meet their needs. In many instances, for some employers, using other streams worked better for them, and the pilot has opened up other conversations with other employers that we have never been able to reach before. It really important to remember that the pilot is but one offering - an important offering - in our full suite of programs. We continue to have conversations with the Health Authority and others about what the most appropriate stream to use to meet their needs is - what makes the most sense for them?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Sorry I was a little late there for the beginning of your presentation. Welcome.

I was reading recently that the federal government is unrolling a new bunch of immigrant programs, specifically for rural areas. It seemed to me that none of the Maritime Provinces was on the list for those programs. They seemed to be more out West and in Ontario and B.C.

I'm just wondering, is there any way that we can get on that list, if there's some way or other that we could be part of the reaching out to the rural areas specifically? It seems that the structure of the existing immigration programs has resulted in 87 per cent of provincial nominees intending to settle in Halifax, which is great for Halifax but not so great for those of us who live outside of this city.

There are organizations like New Dawn that have been calling on government to establish a pilot program to enable regional immigration quotas and provide settlement services and supports in communities outside Halifax. They argue that this kind of targeted local approach is really needed to grow our regional economies that are being obviously undermined by population decline.

Two questions in one: what actions has the department taken to ensure that immigration programs meet the needs of rural communities outside of Halifax, and how is

the department working with organizations in Cape Breton, for instance, to implement programs and policies to increase the share of immigration for that specific region?

MS. TAWHEEL: Perhaps I'll start by first addressing the pilot programs that you referenced from western Canada and Ontario. You're quite correct, those were announced recently by the federal government.

I think it's important to note that we have had the Atlantic Immigration Pilot under way now for two years, and it has resulted in a lot of demand in other parts of the country looking to replicate the pilot because of the success that we're seeing here in Atlantic Canada. IRCC, our federal partner, has been extremely responsive to questions and discussion being had with other provinces and regions across the country to create pilot programs and from those pilot programs, the ones that were just announced and the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, there will be learnings that will help shape the system as a whole.

We have our pilot program now that is seeing great success outside of Halifax. In fact, 40 per cent of the employers that are designated through the project are actually outside of Halifax in rural parts of the province. We're seeing great uptake from employers in other parts of the province.

In response to your comment about these other new programs, we have our pilot program here in this region that does seek to work with rural employers and with rural regions within Atlantic Canada. With regard to your specific comments about working with rural populations, and specifically you referenced Cape Breton . . .

MS. ZANN: And New Dawn.

MS. TAWHEEL: Yes. We work very collaboratively with New Dawn and with other settlement providers and partners in Cape Breton. There are in fact six settlement providers that we work with in Cape Breton, including New Dawn, which would be an important member of that group of six, if you will.

Some of those partners actually came with us recently on a recruitment mission in France to seek francophone immigrants. We are seeing really good success in Cape Breton as well. In fact, Cape Breton's total number of immigrants has increased from 4 to 5 per cent - coming through the provincial pathways with Cape Breton as a destination.

Additionally, with the growth of international students recently at Cape Breton University, which is wonderful - we've been visiting that university very often, and recently held a session with international students where 200 students were in attendance. We want to talk to them early and often about considering staying in Nova Scotia once they graduate, and helping them to understand what the potential pathways are that they could pursue to stay in Nova Scotia.

In summary, I guess I would say the immigration pilot is giving us opportunity to expand important work that we were already doing with regional communities right across the province. In the year ahead, we will look to do more to expand our efforts. Last year, we held 150 information sessions around the province. We'll be doing more in the year ahead, and also expand our marketing efforts. The branding that we've undertaken to roll out, Room To Live - we are using that in international markets.

In the year ahead, we will look to customize that branding on a region by region basis so that we are also promoting the unique attributes of the regions within Nova Scotia that we know combine to make Nova Scotia the attractive place that it is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No follow-up, Ms. Zann?

MS. ZANN: I kind of put two in one, but it's my lucky day. (Laughter) Just because some of the information that I had was that 87 per cent of provincial nominees were saying that they intended to settle in Halifax, so I was a little bit concerned there.

What are you doing to make sure that there is not a backlash to immigration and to immigrants coming into Nova Scotia? I know that some of the political Parties are making a big heyday these days about immigrants and mass immigration and all this kind of stuff. Have you had any kind of backlash or have you had any talks about what you would do if this kind of thing starts to happen here and what the response will be in order to squash it and to make people realize that we actually need immigrants with an aging population? Have you had those discussions and is there any plan to try to deal with that if it comes up?

MS. TAWHEEL: I referenced in the presentation that we had conducted public opinion polling, which we do on a regular basis to make sure of a few things. One, that awareness about the system and our efforts to recruit newcomers to the province is understood and people are aware of that, but also to make sure that we're gauging public sentiment about the merits of immigration.

Toward the end of 2018, we conducted one such piece of public opinion research, and 84 per cent of Nova Scotians were in favour of immigrants coming to Nova Scotia; 87 per cent, an even higher number, believe immigration makes this province a more interesting place to live. So obviously, we're really happy with those numbers.

As your question relates to the immigration pilot, I think the pilot has given us an increased opportunity to be out in communities and to be talking with employers about the merits of diversifying their workforce, which has opened up another avenue for us to continue to spread the word about the merits of immigration.

We know many employers are opinion leaders in their communities, and if they are supportive of bringing newcomers into their workforce, it will also help the community see the merits of bringing newcomers into their community.

[10:30 a.m.]

The brand that we're using internationally - Room to Live - we will also be undertaking more marketing and education efforts domestically in the year ahead to start telling some of the success stories of newcomers that have come to this province that are really making a tremendous contribution.

Our communities in this province are so welcoming and wrap their arms around newcomers, almost from the minute they arrive. We need to make sure that continues and that we're telling the success stories both from the newcomers' perspectives, but also from the communities' perspectives and employers' perspectives.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: I'm very pleased to have you here before us today. I think the good news story is that immigration is being very successful in Nova Scotia. I'm not sure how well it is in other provinces, but here certainly it has been successful. For instance, in the news this morning I heard that new international students were bringing in over \$16 million to CBU and to the community of Cape Breton. That's very positive. What are the things that we're doing to retain our immigrants in Nova Scotia to make sure they stay here, and how that compares with what the rest of the provinces are doing?

MS. TAWHEEL: Thank you for that question. Obviously, settlement and retention are a key piece of the immigration process. Attracting newcomers here is one piece of that process, but ensuring that they are successful once they settle here and then ultimately that they stay here is a key priority.

We do a number of things to help ensure that newcomers feel welcome and that they ultimately put down roots here. We work with 14 settlement providers from one end of the province to the other who provide supports, as I referenced in the presentation, around language supports, employer bridging - just helping newcomers learn to navigate this new system that they have landed in.

Additionally, through those settlement providers, we look at unique opportunities that may be present within local communities to integrate newcomers into the social fabric of those communities. On the screen here, you'll see a map of all the settlement service providers. That's who I'm referencing that we work with from one end of the province to the other to help ensure that newcomers are able to navigate the system.

As I'm sure you can appreciate, each individual foreign national that comes here, they and their families, all have unique needs, so it is important that the settlement service and the supports that they're provided with are tailored to their unique needs, which is an advantage with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

To come back to that program for just one moment - because settlement is at the heart of that program, before a foreign national can be endorsed and ultimately come here to work, the employer must work with a settlement service provider to have a settlement plan in place. That settlement plan is not just for the individual that they're hiring, but for their entire family unit. If there are school-aged children, it's to help them navigate the school system, to help them understand where the local hospital is located or how they can buy a house.

All those factors enter into ensuring that someone can successfully settle here, and ultimately to the member's earlier question, it is about having open and welcoming communities that - I say to the team all the time, from the minute someone contemplates thinking about Nova Scotia, we need to wrap our arms around them and not let them go until we know that they are happy and settled here, and that they plan to put down roots here.

I guess the last point I would make is that Nova Scotia has the highest retention rate in Atlantic Canada. We sit at 71 per cent, and we've been at 71 per cent for the last few years. We want to see that number continue to grow, so we know we have to continue to put an increased emphasis on retention.

It is important to note though that as the number of landings grows, it is 71 per cent of an increasingly larger base of immigrants that we are bringing in. Relative to other provinces in the country, we do have a retention rate slide.

These are our landings - it is 71 per cent of our landings over the past number of years that we continue to retain. Relative to other provinces, our retention rate would be most comparable to Manitoba. Their retention rate, I believe, sits at about 80 per cent. We want to continue to drive that, and as referenced earlier, the immigration pilot is giving us an opportunity to talk with others and to continue to educate about the importance of immigration, which will ultimately lead to more immigrants choosing to come here and, importantly, choosing to stay here.

MR. HORNE: Just a little bit of a follow-up, I guess. What kind of programs are you doing to retain the students who are coming in internationally?

MS. TAWHEEL: Over the last few years, the number of international graduate students that we are attracting or retaining here in Nova Scotia has steadily increased. In 2014, it was sitting at about 35, and this past year we were up to 440 students. We have room there, and we want to continue to grow that number.

International grads are ideal candidates for us to try to attract for immigration to our province. They have spent three or four years or sometimes longer years here pursuing their education. They know the language, and they're already very familiar with what we have to offer.

We're regularly in contact with international students. We do information sessions at all of the university campuses multiple times throughout the year. We work with the on-campus support. As long as a student is an international student, their primary supports are provided through their university support services, but we go in and talk to them about other options post-graduation.

There are also a number of other programs that are in existence such as the Connector Program, which matches up international grads with employers. There's also the Study and Stay program, which takes a cohort of international students and matches them up with employers in a mentor relationship. That program is seeing tremendous success in terms of helping international graduates see that they can have a career and make a career and a life here.

We have meetings with international student services centres at post-secondary institutions. Through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, employers can hire international grads right out of university without any requirement for work experience, so we have certainly been promoting that as a pathway as well for international graduates to pursue and in conversation with all of our partners across the province and with employers across the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: I'm very pleased to hear so much conversation around the table and questions with regard to international students because I do think that there's an extraordinary opportunity there for us. I have heard conversation and questions with regard to post-secondary students, and I know CBU has been doing an extraordinary job, as do SMU and other universities in our province and having international students take part in programs.

However, there is a huge body of international students as well who do come into the province every year, sometimes for several years in a row - some of them do their entire high school education here - in the high schools. I was very pleased recently to do a citizen workshop in one of the local high schools in my constituency. One of the young men who was in my workshop was asking me about how he could become a Canadian citizen. He wanted to stay. He was looking at staying for university and staying beyond.

I do think that if we want to reach out to international students, there are thousands of them as well across this province who are in our high schools. Those seeds could be planted at that level as well. The Study and Stay program that you were talking about sounds wonderful.

Before I was elected, I was here in Halifax, and there were two young women from CBU who were finishing their MBAs. They were entrepreneurs - this province was built on entrepreneurship - and these two young women had started a business, but they had no

idea how to be able to stay in the province and become Canadian citizens. So there are still some gaps there. I know that was two years ago.

You've had wonderful programming that continues to obviously get better and better as the years go by. But when I see strengthening Nova Scotia's economic and social fabric, we're not just looking and seeking immigrants and international students who may become permanent residents of our country that want to seek out an employer, they may want to become employers themselves. So I guess I would like to ask, what stream do we have for students - both maybe in high school as well as those graduating from our post-secondary institutions - what programs do we have for them if they, in fact, want to be entrepreneurs?

MS. TAWHEEL: I agree with you 100 per cent - international graduates and international students are absolutely a target that we would love to see more of. We have an international graduate entrepreneur stream that was launched in 2016. It really at that time addressed a gap in the system of international grads who wanted to start businesses or who had started businesses and did not have a pathway to immigrate.

We can provide a number of examples. A very recent one is an international grad from China who has opened a company called Lumi Studios, a production firm which specializes in bringing clarity through social media and other channels. That international grad has hired a couple of employees.

So we do know - and I agree with you - international graduates and also immigrants come here and stay here with a goal to create employment and to be entrepreneurs themselves. So it absolutely is an important aspect for us to continue to consider.

The international graduate stream is starting to pick up steam now. When we launched the stream in 2016, the people that we're seeing express interest now are those that would have been in university at the time that we launched that stream. So that is certainly a pathway that international grads can use.

MS. PAON: I also wanted to ask a question with regard to key sectors that you had mentioned earlier that are sort of target areas. I am the critic for several portfolios within the Progressive Conservative caucus, and one of them is agriculture. The other one is youth, which is why I was asking you about students. Within agriculture, there is just such a need. We only produce about 20 per cent of our own food here in Nova Scotia, which seems absolutely astounding to think about with the amount of green space that we have and fertile soil.

In the sectors you're specifically trying to fill, is there any kind of program that may be looking at not just employing people to work for agriculture that's already established, but coming in and, in fact, being farmers themselves?

I was having a conversation with a new immigrant on Cape Breton Island coming from a country where they had a huge farm. They're not working in farming at the moment - he and his family. I think he's working as a carpenter, but he has an extraordinary set of skills that he would be interested in and, in fact, trying to have a farm and entering into the agricultural sector here.

So I'm just curious to know, when people do come in with specific skills like that, what is done to try to stream them into an area where they have these skills, and if they do want to become an entrepreneur - a farmer in particular - is there any kind of focus on agriculture in particular?

MS. TAWHEEL: Agriculture certainly is one of the sectors that we look at and have looked at actively through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot specifically. In fact, we have a number - and I referenced Noggins Farm earlier as one of the examples, but we do have other farms that are designated through the immigration pilot to fill those persistent labour gaps that they have.

[10:45 a.m.]

Other occupations that we look at - we commissioned a study in 2017 to look at what our labour gaps were at that point in time, and we continue to update that using data from Statistics Canada, Labour and Advanced Education, and through the pilot. It has opened up other conversations with employers about needs that they may have.

Sometimes there's a little bit of lead time before that gap will show up in, say, census data or Statistics Canada, for example, so things like financial auditors, accountants, and others - professional occupations in advertising, marketing, accounting, tax, civil engineers. Those types of roles are also in demand here.

With regard specifically to your question about agriculture, as I referenced, we have many farms that are using AIP. We also have an entrepreneur stream that is available to potential newcomers who want to start businesses here in the province. Nothing would preclude starting an agricultural-type business such as you have referenced, provided they meet the criteria of the entrepreneur stream in terms of net worth and all of the other things that we would look at before we would issue an invitation to apply to the entrepreneur stream. So there are pathways available, absolutely.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: Critical mass is important to attraction and retention, as we know. There was a Conference Board report included in the research package that said some interviewees expressed the view that government has not been focused on critical mass but rather casting a wider net. Also spousal employment is very important, and there are challenges there in under-employment, which are also significant factors in retention, of course.

There are a couple of things - I was glad to see in the pie chart there, a small sliver of people 75 years and older, so obviously some grandparents have come, which I think is also important to keep many families together. Sometimes grandparents are the ones who help look after the kids and do the cooking and all this kind of thing so that the others can take English classes or get themselves involved in the communities.

My question is, how is the department targeting specific source countries with the goal of growing clusters of diaspora communities in order to enhance retention? Also, what supports are there within the AIP to ensure applicants' partners are connected to meaningful employment?

MS. TAWHEEL: I'll try to make sure I cover all the aspects of your question. There were many aspects.

You referenced the Conference Board report. In Nova Scotia, I would suggest that rather than casting a wide net, we have narrowed our net or our reach, I guess, to make sure that we are targeting the markets where we know we can find newcomers who will fill the specific labour market needs for this province. Other provinces may have need for other types of labour. We are very focused on meeting labour market needs for this province and continue to look at our labour market needs to make sure that our programs are responsive and that we're working to the outermost limits of what we have available to us with our scope of responsibility within the system.

The provincial program falls within the economic class, if you will, of immigrants. Those that we're bringing here, we're bringing primarily because they either have a job offer or the odds of them securing employment are very high because they work in an in-demand occupation.

Within the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, as I referenced earlier, there is a strong focus on settlement. That settlement plan that an employer needs to have in place for the newcomer that they would like to hire includes all aspects of the family unit that will come with that employee. As I mentioned earlier, if they have children, there's support for the children and support for the spouse. Through our settlement providers, they help work on spousal workforce attachment or any other particular needs that a spouse might have. They help them navigate the employment network, the system, within the province.

This is also where having strong, welcoming communities is also really important, because a settlement plan is critical - really important to have - but we know the things that really matter, particularly in smaller communities, is having someone smile and say hi when you go to the Tim Hortons or when you're out in the communities. So ensuring that there is support, I guess that I would characterize more as social and emotional in nature, is as important as helping a spouse find a job. It's knowing there is someone to turn to if you have a challenge in integrating into a new community.

The AIP provides us with an opportunity to make sure a formal settlement plan is in place, that the employer is responsible for putting in place, and then responsible for helping execute as well. We not only ensure that plan is in place, but once the newcomer has arrived and has started to work, we regularly visit worksites. We check in with individuals who are coming through the pilot to make sure that the settlement program is working, and we check in with employers to make sure that relationship is strong and working.

We're hearing very positive results and seeing very positive results to this new model that has settlement at the heart, which is key to some of the earlier questions as well around retention.

MS. ZANN: What statistics does the department keep regarding the employment sectors and locations and demographics of those who do come through the AIP? The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that was mandated by the House of Commons to study immigration to Atlantic Canada recommended that also a gender-based analysis of the AIP be done, and that the targets are developed to set a standard for gender equality.

So what statistics are you keeping regarding all of those things, and also, how has the department been collecting that data about gender-based targets and have they been set?

MS. TAWHEEL: We have not set gender-based targets, but it is certainly an area that we are looking at as we move forward, as we continue to refine. To your earlier question about where we are looking and how wide the net is, those are all aspects that we absolutely need to look at.

Our streams, as I referenced earlier, are economically-driven streams and we are first and foremost at this point seeking the most qualified individual to fill those labour market gaps that we have. Through AIP, employers first are designated and then come back to us for endorsement of a particular candidate that they have sourced, that they have found. We don't apply a gender lens to the analysis of the qualifications of that individual. There are other factors considered, but gender is not one of the factors that we currently do consider, but I'm aware of that reference certainly in the Conference Board report.

MS. ZANN: So are there plans to set gender-based - to follow up on the recommendations?

MS. TAWHEEL: We don't have plans at this point to do that, but I think as demonstrated by the creation of our new streams and - we're always looking at how do we be more responsive to the needs within the province, how do we work best within the structure where we have authority, how do we work best with our partners both federally, municipally and with employers and settlement providers. We're open to looking at what

makes the most sense for this province to ensure that we continue to see ongoing success. That report is something that we are looking at very closely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacKay.

MR. MACKAY: Just a quick comment. I had the opportunity to live and work in Germany for five years, and if there hadn't been the support systems for my spouse, we probably would have lasted five months, rather than five years. So I certainly recognize the importance. In our case, it was the coming together of both the local community, but also strongly the rest of the expat community and so forth that really helped navigate the spouse at becoming comfortable in that area.

Not wanting to belabour the point, but as a representative of rural Nova Scotia - a large part of rural HRM and a significant portion of Lunenburg County - I do have a significant interest in immigration of rural parts. I note what you say about attraction is really just the first step - that retention is the critical component of a successful immigration program. So I'd just like to draw out more, if you could - expand on the efforts that you're making to attract and retain in rural Nova Scotia.

MS. TAWHEEL: As you reiterated, retention is a key component in the whole life cycle, if you will, of immigration. Making a decision to uproot and relocate, in some instances your entire family, to change your life is a very significant decision. So the conversation about retention and settlement really begins right from the first time someone even considers Nova Scotia as a potential place to live.

Once a foreign national, a newcomer and their family arrive in Nova Scotia, there are supports that are in place from the very beginning. So in rural Nova Scotia in particular, there are a number of community organizations quite apart from settlement providers, such as NOW Lunenburg County, that have taken it upon themselves to help Lunenburg and the surrounding area be as welcoming as it can possibly be. So there are supports in place through NOW Lunenburg County, through employers, through other not-for-profit agencies to welcome newcomers and to help them navigate the community to make sure that they have the supports they need.

Our settlement providers, as I referenced earlier, provide support around language training, if it is required. Other supports required to navigate the education system - who are the local real estate agents in the area - all of those aspects are taken into account from a retention perspective.

The statistics that I provided earlier about the support in this province for immigration are also really significant. No one chooses to come anywhere that they haven't done significant research on. Knowing that this province is open and welcoming to newcomers goes a very long way to helping them feel, not just welcome to come here, but welcome and want to stay.

When we attend international recruitment missions, the questions that we get asked - there are obviously questions about the technical aspects of the system, but the lion's share of the questions that we get asked are questions about what it's like to live in Nova Scotia - is there an openness to me, to a newcomer coming to the province? Will I be supported when I get there?

Then questions like, how many cultural facilities do you have? Can we go skating? Does it snow all the time? Those are the questions that we frequently get, about the personality and the makeup of Nova Scotia and not, "Will I find a job?" They're usually questions about can I be happy in this province and will I be supported.

So the retention question - there are a lot of formal supports that are in place, but oftentimes it's the more informal supports that come through organizations like NOW Lunenburg County and others that exist right across the province that are really helping people feel at home and helping them want to stay in the province.

MR. MACKAY: Coming out of the geomatic sector - survey and mapping was my background - I just have a question about the map that was put up earlier. I have a tough time looking at maps that don't have an index, and I'm just wondering if you could give me some indication of what these multi-coloured dots and circles represent.

MS. TAWHEEL: You frightened me when you started talking about GIS mapping. I thought, oh no, we're getting out of my depth now. (Laughter)

[11:00 a.m.]

For some reason, the index fell off the slide, but we can provide all members with a copy that has the index on it. My apologies for that.

MR. MACKAY: Thank you very much. You'll make a great GIS professional.

MS. TAWHEEL: You can see this through the Open Data Portal as well.

MR. MACKAY: The entire presentation?

MS. TAWHEEL: No, this map.

MR. MACKAY: Will the entire presentation be made available to us, the slide deck, in digital form?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can get it.

Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: The formal settlement plans and the openness of communities that we have been talking about are obviously extremely important when it comes to settlement of any newcomer to our province or to our country. You had mentioned that 70 per cent of our new immigrants stay in our province, but I was looking at this map and curious as well what those dots that Mr. MacKay was mentioning just a moment earlier were in reference to. I'm always wary of broad statements. When I hear 70 per cent stay in our province, what does that really mean?

If we have 84 per cent of new immigrants settling within HRM and we have under 1,000 that are elsewhere and about 190 in Cape Breton Island specifically - I know that the AIP program is still in its early days, but how many of those new immigrants who are settling in rural Nova Scotia are in fact staying in rural Nova Scotia past five years and past 10 years? Or are they migrating into HRM within that time period? What are the metrics that you're using to base your statement on that 70 per cent stay in our province? How many stay in rural Nova Scotia? How many stay in Cape Breton Island? Also, that 70 per cent, over what timeline is that?

MS. TAWHEEL: If I miss a part of your question, I'll just ask you to repeat it.

So 71 per cent is our retention rate over the last three-year period. With regard to where people settle, through our provincial nominee program, the majority of newcomers do settle in Halifax - you are correct in saying that. AIP is providing us with an opportunity to expand our reach outside of Halifax. The 40 per cent of employers who are designated outside of the sort of HRM area or Halifax City proper area are providing us with great opportunities to increase the number of newcomers who are coming to other parts of the province.

To derive that 71 per cent, we look at tax filer data; that's where the number is derived from. It's a five-year rolling average that we look at. It's 71 per cent of immigrants who are still in Nova Scotia after their sixth year being here. It looks at quite a wide point in time, and it's pulled from the longitudinal immigration database. That's where the information comes from.

We do have more work to do to attract newcomers to other parts of the province. Halifax is very well known when we travel internationally. Sometimes Halifax is more known than Nova Scotia. Sometimes folks can't situate where Halifax is actually located. We do a little bit of work on educating about the full province.

To my earlier point about taking our international marketing efforts and customizing them on a region-by-region basis, that is all part of our effort to begin to educate and to drive more newcomers to other parts of the province. It's also why we are inviting organizations like the Cape Breton Partnership and others to come with us on international recruitment missions, so that we can talk about Nova Scotia broadly, and they can talk about the unique and very attractive aspects of the community that they represent.

We will continue to do that in the year ahead, to try to drive those numbers to other parts of the province.

MS. PAON: I'm not sure if this is included in your five-year rolling average, if you have these numbers - I'm very curious to know how many of the new immigrants that have settled in rural Nova Scotia stay in rural Nova Scotia. I'm talking about within province - I'm looking for those numbers. People that have landed in welcoming communities in rural Nova Scotia - do we see them actually migrating within the province to our urban centre or are we seeing that they are, in fact, maintaining the residency in rural Nova Scotia?

I would be very curious to know why, obviously, we're losing 30 per cent. That is quite a large number. As much as 70 per cent is a wonderful average for retention, we are losing that 30 per cent. So it's a huge investment in the immigration process that's obviously leaving the province as well. It's a lot of financial burden to the province when we have people that are leaving it after five or six years. I'd like to know why, and if there are studies being done, why they're leaving our province in such large numbers.

MS. TAWHEEL: We actually have a piece of research under way right now trying to dig into exactly what you've just articulated. It's called Stayers and Leavers - the piece of research that we're doing - because we do want to get to the heart of why people leave. We think we know why people stay, but the question about why they leave can sometimes be a little more nuanced and complex.

Some people leave because of employment opportunities elsewhere or because of other family circumstances - things that, no matter what we change here, it's probably not going to entice them to stay, but we do want to drive that number up and so we need some further data and intelligence into why they stay, and importantly, why they don't stay. So that is a really critical question that we are asking and hope to have answered soon, or have some data back that will point in that direction.

We do have some stats about how employees who come and seek employment and who have employment, how long they stay with that employer - so after three years, the majority are still employed with the same employer. We don't have that broken down necessarily on a community-by-community basis so that we could sort of map it, if you will, right across the province.

We do know that with regard to our immigration statistics and our success statistics, immigrants do better here from a salary perspective, and their top reasons why they stay here are job opportunities and the things that I talked about earlier - having welcoming communities and having those supports in place.

They sometimes will leave because they have friends and family in other parts of the country. They may be seeking higher wages or a different job opportunity. We do know that the vast majority of them remain employed with the same employer three years after they have arrived here.

The bigger question about stayers and leavers, we do need to dig further into that. If we can figure some of that out, then we can probably crack the nut, if you will, in terms of driving up our retention numbers even higher.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: Settlement service provider organizations are key to the success of our AIP, and these organizations have indicated recently that their workloads have spiked, naturally, and that their capacity is therefore stretched. So I'd like to ask, how is government investing in order to strengthen the capacity of SPOs, and do any SPOs operating in Nova Scotia currently have multi-year funding agreements or do they just operate on a year to year basis?

MS. TAWHEEL: As I mentioned earlier, we work very collaboratively with our settlement service providers. They receive funding through the federal government, but also through the provincial government. We invest \$6.4 million annually with our settlement service providers and recently put two-year funding agreements in place with those settlement service providers, recognizing that a two-year agreement provides more stability for those organizations and allows them to be focused on the work within which they are experts - settlement service provision - and not constantly applying for funding year over year over year.

We recognize that as we continue to increase the number of landings to this province, so too will the demand on our settlement service providers increase, which is why we need to work very collaboratively with them to understand the services that they are providing and also the nature of the type of newcomer who is coming here. We know, for example, that when the Syrian refugees arrived here a few years ago, the supports that cohort of newcomer required is very different than the support that another type of newcomer arriving would need.

We are working with our service providers to understand the services that they are providing that are driving their business, if you will, to make sure that we are funding them appropriately to provide services that will ultimately lead to success in terms of successfully settling newcomers and making sure that they have the support that they need.

The immigration pilot has also placed more emphasis on settlement, which in turn has placed more pressure on settlement service providers. It is an ongoing conversation with those providers. Our funding to providers has increased. It was held steady last year, but the years prior to that, we have increased our funding to those providers, and we'll continue to have conversations with them about what they're seeing.

The data that I referenced, the Stayers and Leavers research that we're doing, will be really helpful as well for settlement service providers to understand their role in that whole equation. They're a critical link in the chain, if you will, of immigration, and we need to make sure that we are in very close contact and working very closely with them.

MS. ZANN: Do you foresee a budget increase in the coming budget for settlement services in order to lessen the load, to give them some more money to be able to lessen their load and maybe hire more to help with what they need to do?

MS. TAWHEEL: I couldn't speak to any upcoming budget decisions. I will say, however, that we just started two-year funding agreements. We're only one year into a two-year funding agreement with our settlement service providers. We are in ongoing conversations with providers to make sure that we have a good handle on what their needs are and that they are part of our ongoing conversations about our desire to continue to drive the number of newcomers who are coming to this province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. JESSOME: Thank you both for your time here today. I would like to focus on health care professionals. The deputy referenced - I believe the number was 732 health care professionals who have entered the province. I would like you to clarify what that time frame was and, if possible, the different types of jobs that the health care professionals would fall into and the geography. There's three tiers there.

MS. TAWHEEL: There are pieces of your question that I can answer. I referenced that since 2013, 732 health care professionals other than physicians have been nominated or endorsed through our programs. In that mix would be included registered nurses, LPNs - licensed practical nurses - nurses' aides, continuing care assistants, physiotherapists, and medical laboratory technologists.

I can't provide you with a breakdown of exactly where all those individuals have gone. I can only provide you with the numbers that have come through.

[11:15 a.m.]

With regard to the recently created physician stream, I can tell you specifically with that program - well, first, before that program was created since 2013, 66 doctors have been nominated or endorsed through the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, but in February 2018, almost a year ago, we launched a new immigration stream, a dedicated physician stream since the launch. As of the end of December 2018, we have brought 18 physicians through that dedicated stream: 15 family medicine doctors and three specialists. Those physicians have settled from one end of the province to the other so there's good representation across all the regions of the province.

In support of that dedicated physician stream, we've embarked on international recruitment missions. We took part in four in 2018 with our colleagues at the Nova Scotia Health Authority and the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

As I said, this stream targets general practitioners, family doctors, and specialist physicians who have a full-time job offer with the Nova Scotia Health Authority or the

IWK. We're really proud of this stream because we've really streamlined the process for physicians, so we can nominate a physician in as little as five days, once they've received a job offer from the Health Authority or the IWK.

We've done this by working in collaboration and by taking into consideration the very comprehensive assessment that the Health Authority or the IWK does. Prior to making a job offer, they are assessing a number of criteria. We accept their comprehensive assessment, and all we require is proof of eligibility to work in Canada - diploma, passport - and the fact that they have a valid job offer from the Nova Scotia Health Authority or the IWK.

As you may be aware, we've targeted markets where there is a reciprocal credential recognition - so the U.K., Ireland, Australia, and the U.S. We've primarily focused on the U.K. and Ireland over the course of the last year. We have a unique advantage in that the college here recognizes the credentials that come from institutions - particular institutions - in those markets, which allows us to speed up the process considerably.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I'm sorry if you answered this and I missed it, but what did you say the federal-provincial split was for the AIP program? It's funded by both the province and the feds, correct?

MS. TAWHEEL: The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is, in fact, a federal program. The federal government has a very particular role with AIP. From a provincial perspective, our focus is working with employers - designating the employer and then endorsing the candidate. The federal focus is on assessing the foreign national that the employer wants to hire, issuing the temporary work permit and assessing the application for permanent residency.

It is a federal program. The Atlantic Provinces are partners working on that program, but as is the case with immigration writ large, the federal government does have the lion's share of the responsibility for the immigration system. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

MR. JOHNS: The \$9.5 million, that's the provincial budget for the AIP program?

MS. TAWHEEL: We provide our service provider organizations - the settlement providers - with \$6.4 million annually in funding. The funds for settlement providers to support AIP is funded through the federal government. Does that answer your question?

MR. JOHNS: I guess ultimately, what does the Province of Nova Scotia contribute to the program? That's what I want to know.

MS. TAWHEEL: Contribute financially to the program? We are contributing staffing resources to processing applications, to travelling around the province and holding information sessions, to working with employers and helping them navigate the system. We're providing funding for marketing and promotion of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, and we're providing employer supports through partnerships with the regional economic networks and others to help promote the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

MS. ZANN: Just to be clear, it says that 1,073 people have been endorsed since AIP began. You said 732 of those are health care professionals, not doctors?

MS. TAWHEEL: No. The physician stream that I'm talking about is not part of AIP.

MS. ZANN: But you said 732 health care professionals other than doctors. Is that correct?

MS. TAWHEEL: That is a different statistic quite apart from our AIP results. They have come through other streams within the Provincial Nominee Program, not as part of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

MS. ZANN: I see. So of the 1,073 people who have been endorsed, how many of those people are health professionals? Do you have those statistics?

MS. TAWHEEL: I wouldn't have those numbers with me. I can say that through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, if you can see that on the screen . . .

MS. ZANN: Not really. I can't really see it. Sorry.

MS. TAWHEEL: It's included in your package. The immigration pilot does have three categories within it where we're looking to bring in highly skilled foreign nationals, what we consider intermediate skilled, and international graduates. I couldn't break out for you now exactly - the number you quoted, the 737, I couldn't break out for you in fine detail exactly what every occupation of all of those 737 individuals would be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft. (Interruption) That was two.

MS. ZANN: I just want to clarify something.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: The number I was quoting was on this page here, and it says 1,073 people have been endorsed; 872 of them in 2018. I'm just curious - of those 1,073 people, do we know how many of them are health care professionals?

MS. TAWHEEL: I would not have that specific number. I couldn't list them all for you today. I'm sorry; I was quoting the 737 when you were talking about the 1,073. I couldn't give you that exact breakdown today.

MS. ZANN: But you do have it, though?

MS. TAWHEEL: Yes, we generally have a breakdown of - we know the jobs that individuals are coming to fill.

MS. ZANN: If you could maybe get that to us, that would be great. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: In the Fall, I believe, there was recruitment for early childhood educators here in the province. Was your department part of that program as well?

MS. TAWHEEL: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, at the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, we work really hard to make sure that we are responding to labour market needs in the province. Through the creation of the pre-Primary program, there was a labour market need for early childhood educators, and through one of our newly created streams - called the labour market priorities stream - we did a targeted effort to recruit early childhood educators.

Through that stream, we invited 314 early childhood educators to apply to come to Nova Scotia. Thus far, as of the end of December, we've had 220 of the 314 respond positively to those invitations, and we have nominated 187 early childhood educators to come to Nova Scotia. That doesn't mean that they're all here yet, but it does mean that they have a nomination and they can come here, and because of the labour market need in this particular occupation, their odds of becoming employed are extremely high.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Did you have any specific criteria for any of them, such as language skills in different areas, like francophones, maybe Arabic requirements or specifications that you were looking for to fill in any positions?

MS. TAWHEEL: The way the labour market priority stream works, as I mentioned earlier, is that we look for what the labour market need is and then we identify where we can draw the qualified applicants from. We use a database that IRCC maintains of registered newcomers who have provided information about their language skills, about their education, about their interest.

Through the labour market priority stream, we are able to draw from that database those potential newcomers who have expressed a desire to come specifically to Nova Scotia or who have not specified a particular jurisdiction, we can draw from the database to pull that information.

For this early childhood education process that we went through, we did not specify any additional languages beyond English or French. Those are the languages that we would primarily be seeking, and certainly other languages would be a bonus, if you will. Of these 187, there may be some in the mix who will speak additional languages that could be helpful in a pre-Primary, but English and French are the primary languages that we seek.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This will be the last round - Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: I'm sorry, I guess I wasn't clear. On Page 2 of the slides, it shows a budget of \$9,562,000. Could you explain to me what that budget is? Is that for the overall department or is that towards this program itself?

MS. TAWHEEL: That is the overall budget for the Office of Immigration. That is not strictly for the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. That is our budget.

MR. JOHNS: Other than staffing and in-house resources that are paid for through the regular budget process provincially, all other funding for this program comes from the federal government. What is the actual amount of funding that the federal government is paying towards the program?

MS. TAWHEEL: As you referenced - your summary is correct - we're providing staff, resources and a focused effort on promoting the immigration pilot. We've also invested shared funding with ACOA with partners across the province with the regional economic networks to support them in the promotion of the pilots. So they're working with us to make sure that supports are on the ground to work with employers.

The federal government is providing pre-arrival support. I don't think we have the actual number with us that the federal government is providing, but they are investing in our settlement providers - they've provided funding to them. They've provided support for pre-arrival through the settlement providers. It is a federal program so it is appropriate that the lion's share of the funding would be coming through the federal government for this program.

MR. JOHNS: Knowing that the \$9.5 million is the overall budget, that changes all the figures and facts that I calculated here. So my question ultimately is: what is the average provincial cost per immigrant who comes through the AIP program? What's the average that it's costing the province? Have we figured that out?

[11:30 a.m.]

MS. TAWHEEL: We have not calculated that. I would suggest it would be a bit challenging to calculate that, given that each individual newcomer who comes is different, so the supports they need are different once they arrive - what they need prior to arrival, what they need once they have landed, and what they need to be retained - would be different. It's not something that we've looked at. We can certainly go back and take a look

at that, if we can calculate that. I'm honestly not sure if we could actually come down to a hard number because the support that's required does vary. The effort that an employer undertakes as well to find that employee would vary based on the markets that they need to go into to find that employee. I think it would be a challenging number to derive. I think it would be challenging.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: I thought you said earlier it was \$6.4 million annually, right?

MS. TAWHEEL: To settlement service providers.

MS. ZANN: Right, exactly. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program - I know that's not the AIP, but we have been hearing from some companies like, for instance Victoria seafood, that they're struggling to have workers return because they prefer to go to P.E.I. where they say there's an easier path to permanent residency. Has there actually been any discussion yet within the department about the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and whether that could be a path to bringing and retaining more immigrants?

MS. TAWHEEL: The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is a federal program. It is not within the provincial domain. Seasonal employment falls within the federal purview of the program. However, through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, there is an opportunity for employers to hire those who have worked for them as temporary foreign workers. The pilot does provide us an opportunity to bring in employees that employers may have deemed are those they would like to keep long term and who have expressed an interest in being here. The pilot does provide us with an avenue to explore options for temporary foreign workers to stay here permanently.

MS. ZANN: What would you say, then, to someone like Victoria seafood, which says that it's very difficult to retain their workers and bring them back because they're preferring to go to P.E.I. where it's an easier path to permanent residency?

MS. TAWHEEL: My suggestion would be to have them reach out to us directly, and we can work with them. As I mentioned earlier, we're working with hundreds of employers right across the province. We would be very happy to work with them to try to help them figure out a way to have the immigration system work for them. As I referenced earlier, temporary foreign workers are within the federal domain, but there may be other opportunities through the pilot or through other streams that are within the provincial domain where we could support them, and we would be very happy to do that.

MS. ZANN: Thank you very much - great.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: Just to change the subject a little bit, I guess, how long does it take to get a profile of an immigrant that you're satisfied with and that you're helping? How long does it take to go through that process?

MS. TAWHEEL: You're referring to processing times?

MR. HORNE: Approximate wait times and numbers and so on.

MS. TAWHEEL: I'm really pleased with the work that we've undertaken in the Office of Immigration over the last few years to streamline our processing time. We have reduced our processing time from 179 days, down to roughly 33 days. We undertook the lean approach to looking at our processing. We moved our processing to online versus paper. That has resulted in huge savings from a time perspective and allowed our nominee officers to be more focused on increasing our processing time which has had a direct impact on the number of individuals that we have been able to nominate through our programming. As I referenced earlier, with the physician stream, we are processing those applications in as little as five days.

It can be a fairly quick process on the provincial side, of course provided that we have all the information that we need to process the application. IRCC has ultimate authority for admissibility to the country. Their processing times would be in some instances significantly longer than the provincial processing times.

MR. HORNE: Just as a follow-up, I guess, immigrants who need your help and so on, do you have much interaction with the immigrant themselves? I know one question might be they would like to go to employers and talk to employers, and I don't think that's the way you allow it to happen. Employers have to go to the employee.

MS. TAWHEEL: Through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, we recently have put on our website the list of employers that are designated through the pilot, which is allowing potential foreign nationals, potential employees, to reach out directly to companies to express their interest in working with them. We don't prevent that kind of contact from happening, if you will. Certainly a lot of employers are finding their employees through that mechanism.

In some instances, when we travel to international recruitment events, we bring employers with us, so they're recruiting on the spot. If they're not able to travel with us, we bring their jobs with us. We have job profiles with us and can provide those to potential interested candidates so that they in turn can follow up with employers and apply for employment with them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Taweel, I will give you a few moments to wrap it up, but if the committee would indulge me for a moment, I would like to ask a question.

It's kind of something that has been weighing on my mind the last few days here. I had a young couple from Palestine, actually, come into my office the other day - they would be in their 30s, with three children. The lady has been a citizen of Canada for 25 years. The young man is a landed immigrant and is working through getting his citizenship. He was a nurse in the Gaza Strip, an emergency room nurse, so he started telling me about some of the stuff he had seen. He is in the process of trying to get his qualifications here in Canada so that he can be an emergency room nurse.

It's a two-part question. One is, what is your office doing to support individuals like that? What he had said is it's very depressing, it's very difficult for him, day-to-day, not being able to do the job he loves. Secondly, I guess one of the things that hit me hardest was the mother was saying that she faces racism every single day. She recently took her daughter to the hospital and faced racism there. She faces it at the grocery store. She faces it everywhere she goes. They are very much afraid.

To be honest with you, what they had said to me was the rhetoric's being amped up on all sides, I guess, but in particular going into this upcoming election. CBC and a few other media had quoted a few polls that immigration is actually probably the top issue now for a lot of people heading into the federal election. They're afraid, and they're seeing more and more - this came right from their mouths - open racism.

Obviously I know what we can do as individuals. I think it's incumbent on all of us to call people out when we see this kind of racism in our communities. What is the department, your office, doing to help those individuals? It also makes them feel like they don't want to be here. That was one of the things that came out of their mouths. They have three kids. One of the things that kind of stuck with me is, the young man said, people think I don't want to be here. People think this or that of me. He said, live one day in Gaza. I will guarantee you, you'll love and respect everything that Canada has. What are we doing, what are you doing, to help support and kind of calm those individuals? There's a lot there. There was the skills side of it, and there was also this ugliness that some of them are facing.

MS. TAWHEEL: Perhaps I'll start on the skills side. Credentialling is obviously very important, and it is something that we understand can sometimes be a challenge for individuals such as the one that you have spoken of, your constituent. Credentialling is the responsibility of their respective professional colleges or bodies, and the recognition of those credentials falls with those colleges. It is not within the purview of the Office of Immigration.

You did reference that this individual is an emergency room nurse. We do fund bridging programs for nurses to help them navigate the system and help them figure out the path they need to take to secure the credentials they need to work here. I would be happy to provide you with that info to pass along.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please do.

MS. TAWHEEL: Hearing stories such as the one that your constituents shared with you about racism and their dealings with racism, we're not blind to the fact that things like that do happen within this province and within our country. We recognize that, and we know that's why we have to continue to educate. To your point, if we see something happening, we need to call that out. If I could be allowed to put my Communities, Culture and Heritage hat on, through the Culture Action Plan, we very clearly state in that plan that systemic racism and discrimination remain a challenge in this province that we do need to tackle. Working in collaboration between the two offices, we will undertake under the "Room" brand, over the course of this year, domestic marketing efforts to educate and inform to try to tackle some of those persistent issues that do continue to plague us.

The last thing I would say is through our settlement service providers, there are supports available of every nature, even just counselling support, someone to talk to about experiences that this particular family may be going through. I know the settlement service providers are more than happy to provide support - and a network of others who may have experienced similar things or quite opposite experiences to learn and seek support from others who are new to this province as well. It's absolutely something that we have to keep our eye on. We can't be arrogant enough to think that it doesn't happen here because it does.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your time. You have about five minutes if you want to wrap it up.

MS. TAWHEEL: Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today to talk about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. As I believe we all agree, immigrants make our province stronger in a number of different ways. They bring unique skills and services and are in high demand. They enrich and expand our culture, and they make Nova Scotia a dynamic and vibrant province.

We have made immigration a priority and are committed to working with the federal government to increase the number of immigrants coming to Nova Scotia. As I referenced earlier, we are experiencing success. Last year in Nova Scotia, more immigrants were approved to make our province home than ever before. There can be no doubt that the Atlantic Immigration Pilot has contributed to this success. As I mentioned earlier, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot was launched in March 2017 as a three-year pilot under the Atlantic Growth Strategy, and its primary aim was to fill persistent labour gaps. Here in Nova Scotia, interest in the pilot is strong and continues to grow. We're really pleased, even thus far in 2019, that we're seeing tremendous uptake with the pilot.

Last Fall, figures released from Statistics Canada indicate that Nova Scotia has the highest population in our history. According to those latest numbers, the province has added 26,373 residents since 2015, to reach a total population of 964,693 as of October 1st. That's good news for our economy and good news for the overall growth of our province.

[11:45 a.m.]

The last thing I would say in closing is that your role as MLAs is really an important one in the immigration process as well. I did not mention that when I talked about the whole immigration chain, if you will. As evidenced, Mr. Maguire, by your question about your constituent, you play a key role in helping to educate those in your communities - the leaders within your communities - and helping us spread the word about the merits of immigration and the contribution that immigrants make in the community is a vital role. We thank you for what you do every day and hope that we can continue to work with all of you.

Lastly, I would like to thank Suzanne and the staff at the Office of Immigration who are hard-working and dedicated, who spend their days every day trying to change people's lives. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll take a 30-second break to let them leave.

[11:46 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:47 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. The committee has been called to order. We do have some correspondence from the Executive Council Office and from the Public Service Commission. I'm just wondering if there is any conversation around it. Everything looks good to everybody? Suzanne Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I would just like to remark that I appreciate having the clerk's letter attached to the response. I think that's a good format for us to have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good job. The other thing I wanted to bring up, and I brought it to our counsel and clerk about potentially asking the Speaker's Office - it has been kind of a pet peeve - about the amount of paper that we get, and if there's any way that we can figure out a method to maybe go paperless. Is it okay if the committee puts forward a request to the Speaker's Office to look at other committees across the country to see if any of them have gone paperless and what they've done, and if there's any way that we could at least look into that to see if it's something that will work for our committee? Mr. MacKay.

MR. MACKAY: I certainly applaud you for bringing that forward. I would suggest then that we be able to use iPads or so forth when we're here in order to do these things, if that would be okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That has been what has been suggested, is that maybe a tablet or an iPad or something like that could be used to help reduce some of this paper that we're taking on. Mr. Johns.

MR. JOHNS: Personally, I'm agreeable to that. What I will state is, having sat on many, many committees, I've never seen it work yet. There are people who like their hard copies.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We could be a trendsetter.

MR. JOHNS: I'm supportive of it, but I hope everybody else around the table can do it as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is everybody in support of at least sending something to the Speaker's Office to see if we can investigate this - look into it?

MS. ZANN: Are they going to supply the iPads?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's something that we'll look at too. This is just kind of a preliminary discussion to have with the Speaker's Office. Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: Something that would be helpful - I like to take notes and put notes on the information because I reference them as I'm going through the meeting. It may just be a bit of a time-crunch situation. We get our packages - I make notes all over them, as you can see. There are notes all over the place. I give this to someone else when I return to my office. If there's some way to be able to facilitate to make certain that packages come in early enough that notes can be made on - I don't even know what kind of format that would be - pdf.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's not stopping anyone from bringing a notepad here. I'm just saying a lot of times we get a lot of information that could easily just be sent in a pdf form. It could be on an iPad. We could read that. The presentation - I didn't look at the actual paper copy once. I just kind of looked at the screen the entire time.

MS. ZANN: I couldn't even see the screen.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know, but I have a better view because it's right in front of me, but if we all had an iPad or something, we could go through it. It's just a thought. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but it's just something that - I mean, we've all been in committees where we've just been piled on with the paper, and at times it seems kind of wasteful. Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: I do actually like to have the presentation in my hand, to be honest. I'm the same as you - I make notes all over it too. It's harder to do on an iPad.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we still okay with seeing if there are other options?

MS. ZANN: Sure, look into it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: With that, that brings the committee to a close with no further business. Enjoy, and have a great week.

[The committee adjourned at 11:51 a.m.]